

David Hiestand  
English 0030B Online  
Jane Hemmerling

### Big Time:

#### The Inevitable Quest for Glamour in *Babylon Revisited* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*

As Americans, people are tempted to isolate and become xenophobic. The American culture has led the way to worldwide pop culture in many regards, and the bandwagon has been ridden consistently. America has the identity of a special and young country whereas many other countries root themselves more in an identity of culture that is descended rather than ascending. This identity of America becomes superimposed on the populace, and whether young or old, Americans seem to be more tempted to think of themselves as an aspiring center of pop culture than feeling that they need to carve out a unique niche within the small chunk of history that they are privileged to exist within. This too has spread around the world like American popular culture, but no matter where an American goes, he or she brings a vibe of the glamorous ambition that runs in the veins of the American. This inner strife can really run amok when the person is isolated and allowed to create their own environment, say in a foreign country, as expatriates do.

This concentration of new majesty is always touted as the results of being on the cutting edge of culture, but this sentiment and vibe has existed for a long time. Before idols there were stars, and before stars there were icons. Before icons there were artists and authors, and before them there were the legends and gods that the artists, authors, and storytellers depicted. Artists and authors transform with their surroundings and then depict. F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway provide allegories for themselves, for the American animal abroad, and for any person with aspirations. Of note are their works, *Babylon Revisited* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* respectively. They examine youthful ambition and its squandering, the transition from irresponsibility to responsibility, and facing or not facing oneself and reality. Both of these authors had spent time in France, and so their stories have characters who have spent time in France. These characters represent their authors, but they also do more than that. These stories are microcosmic representations of the life journey of any person who has had ambition and failed in realizing it or failed in not realizing it.

The main characters in both of these stories have their tragic objects of affection, but it can really be hard to determine whom these objects are because of the chaos within the main characters. *Babylon Revisited's* Charlie has both Lorraine and Honoria, but he also has himself. His self destructive lifestyle was a detriment to himself but also his family, and his lack of reflection caused him to lose that which should have mattered most to him. In this way, the objects of affection are lost to death and inability to even function, but he also loses the most important part of himself; he loses his emotional connection to anything beside his vaingloriousness so that when he attempts to rehabilitate himself, he puts himself in a position where just that characteristic is all that awaits him, but barely even that as the environment has apparently changed.

Much like Charlie, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro's* Harry had also lost much during youth, where his passions had viciously interlaced with heartfelt loyalties and attempted

to strangle them as an anaconda would choke and consume a household dog that had wandered into its hunting grounds. Harry had also given up his true love, but that was himself and his self-expression. He had literally courted high society while at the same time acknowledging the lack of truth inherent in their culture. He climbed the ranks earlier on with his writing and used his writing to launch his dating so that he could date different women who were constantly richer, almost as a stream of wealth to his thirst. He did not write to his heart's contentment though. He instead chose to enjoy parties and comfort. For both of these characters, the question has to be their level of regret and true aspirations.

Youth is not only age, but a place in one's development, so age is not the issue as youth is often recaptured or severed early on. As to youth, though, it is generally spent wasted to a large extent, and this occurrence is not unique to any particular class of people. The difficulty lies in finding oneself, and this occurs, unfortunately, at the same time that one should be establishing who he or she is. Whether the joys of indulgence or the satisfaction of completing something great happen to be in the forefront of a person's mind, it is that battle between the two that encompasses the days of the young person, and what a person claims is their goal.

There is the difficulty that even what one interprets as their goal might not be their actual goal. With successful expression and submission to society of that expression comes recognition, and fame inevitably turns into wealth. Harry's battle was to choose whether to spend his time constantly digging for gold or sitting on top of a visible mountain of it, so his choice is not so surprising. By Harry's own admission, "However you make your living is where your talent lies." (832 Hemingway), so by his definition, it wasn't the digging that was his greatest talent. There is also the choice between the tangible possessions of life that are valued by society and the intangible ones, which are somewhat less valued. This is Charlie's battle, as he enjoys the passionate and wild times that he spends with his wife away from his daughter, but has to later reconcile the fact that it probably destroyed them all emotionally and to some extent physically. These are not mature choices, but this is not recognized as a negative, rather as a fact of being, "All the catering to vice and waste was on an utterly childish scale" (678, Fitzgerald), and that's simply the past of these characters.

No, the passions of youth are not pursued blindly. There are reasons to engage in such brilliant wastes of time, and for some, these reasons are enough to counteract the sacrifice of future growth and of current wealth. Harry relates, "You kept from thinking and it was all marvelous" (831 Hemingway). From Charlie's narration, his lifestyle was "an offering to destiny that he might not remember the things worth remembering" (678 Fitzgerald). The spending of wealth of love may be regretted as may the waste of the wealth of talent, but in youth, such things are often set aside for indulgence. With monetary wealth, the myth that wealth comes and goes is perpetuated, but certain wealth does not always return. This is the carelessness that comes with small successes, though they often seem large. This is also the gambling nature of humanity, and in youth there is always gambling as both authors, through their characters, relate. Everything is a gamble to some extent, and when constantly gambling, the sure thing of immediate joy may seem like a safe bet when compared to the likelihood of consistent and current love of family being unreachable, or a bottomless well of talent running dry. These things that have always been there seem as if they will always be, but once they

are gone, they do not ever truly return. Further, when a person gives himself over to other powers, those powers will have something of a hold on him or her until the day he or she dies, as is the case for our protagonists and their partners/wives.

The closer people are to death, the more they reflect on the choices that they made and on the quality of person that they were. Now older, Charlie relates that, "He believed in character; he wanted to jump back a whole generation and trust in character again as the eternally valuable element. Everything else wore out" (678). He states this, though he acknowledges his power and manipulation of the high-character Marion. He acknowledges that he spoiled his environment with overindulgence, but "his own rhythm was different now" (680, Fitzgerald). He had spent the wealth that came as a constant stream as he had spent or sold his one-of-a-kind commodities, but now he seems to know the difference if he did not at the time. Perhaps, as Harry's truest talent was charm, Charlie's talent would be in deception, as he narrates his manipulation of Marion, though they both had this talent to deceive or convolute their thoughts and intentions. Harry relates that, he, "spoke only from habit and to be comfortable"(831 Hemingway).

There is no dying or dead breed of ambition and as such there is no difference in the reflection and nostalgia of the pop culture American of yesteryear versus today. As characters' lives, so go peoples' lives. Nothing really changes other than absences and new roles, but reflection provides new insight, "His first feeling was one of awe [ . . . ] In retrospect it was a nightmare" (686, Fitzgerald). In some contexts, the people remain the same, but the roles are so drastically different that the atrocities of the past are unmistakable such as in war, "Those were the same Austrians they killed then that he skied with later" (829 Hemingway). The artist/author creates and becomes that: This gift to world culture and society that is the living legend. This battle between the integral artist and the wasteful star occurs in the talented and driven mind, and it drives them to both flee and chase their inner calling. It is this conflicted nature that drives an author to leave their home only to be iconic of it, and also to write about it with thinly veiled self-identified characters. They vindicate and vilify themselves at the same time.

Whether it is artistry or its evil twin, pop culture, that is poison, something infects the tortured artist and the common man. The drive to become and to create is as inevitable and infectious as the disappointment in oneself and life after both great failures and successes when time allows reflection. This common connection allows these authors to be such icons and experience their unique circumstances while at the same time externalizing their feelings onto their characters and connecting with their audience. It is this universal growth during one's withering and downfall during one's rise that audiences melancholically gravitate toward. It is the unique circumstance of those without foresight destroying themselves and presenting the romance of it that provides context to our poisonous cultural ouroboros. So, the question will hang over the heads of all that if we take nothing with us to the grave, should we leave a legacy or enjoy the moment? The answer depends on the person as it does the character.

#### WORKS CITED

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